

On Leadership

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We are all potential leaders. Moreover, throughout our lives there is a wide range of opportunities which allow us to put our leadership skills into practice. Democratic choice of leaders comes to my mind like playing on a high school football team, being a group member in some class presentation, or even the mere brain-racking what-is-there-for-dinner choice. However, are we all in fact born leaders? Certainly not. I believe that the struggle for leadership is essentially a natural process which may be compared to the rocks in the bottom of a river. Pebbles are more likely to be dragged by the flow, whereas boulders stand their ground and also restrain the pebbles. On this basis I formulate my thesis: although not everyone may be naturally gifted to become a leader, we shall always be either a pebble or a boulder.

What is a leader? A Leader is a person who holds a dominant or superior position within a field, and is able to exercise a high degree of control or influence over others. Now, parting from this definition one cannot help thinking of outstanding figures of the past like B. Mussolini, F. Franco, I. Stalin, Adolf H...; besides, one can remember particular characters of books. I can recall the name Jack, for instance, one of the eldest of a group of boys stranded on an island, who became adept to manipulating the others. On the contrary, a second group of exponents may be considered. Those people who have laid down their lives to fulfill their ideals, and were immortalized on account of their immense passion: Gandhi, Luther King, Mother Teresa, (just to mention a few of them); or, in turn, characters like Ralph, (as there is no thorn without a rose) who, in opposition to Jack, he is democratically elected leader by the boys marooned on the island. Actually, a more suitable term to define the former group is “dictator”. However, I do not wish to concentrate on them. It is not my desire to focus on the latter either because they belong only to one branch of what leadership means to me. Besides one can highlight what they have in common, and that is the presence of (let us say...) “something” which an irrelevant number of followers pursue, in the same way as ducklings march after their mother.

In the same way a mother duck supports her ducklings, boulders sustain pebbles, and that is to me the role that a leader plays. The flow drags the pebbles until they stick to a boulder which is too heavy to be pushed by the stream, and they remain there. Alas, imagine that someone should suddenly remove a boulder. It would do no harm to displace some pebbles, but the loss of a boulder would again trigger the drag of pebbles, until they find another boulder to support them. This demonstrates the relevance of leaders — boulders— and the fact that their followers —pebbles— always end up following a leader.

I have said we shall always be either a pebble or a boulder. I am almost tempted to assert that we shall always be pebbles and only a few of us will become boulders. We may come across a great variety of leaders in our lives, from start to finish. I believe that we flow through life directed by different

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kinds of leaders. When we are born we intersect the first boulder in our lives, our mother. We depend on her. She supports us. And her absence renders us helpless. Then, there is a point at which we stop depending on our mother (or at least... not totally). Our father takes a part too, and after that, external leaders such as friends, relatives, TV programs, shape us defining who we are. Even when we reach adulthood we continue to be influenced by leaders. Religion, politics, fashion, the media determine the way we think and lead the actions we perform. On the other hand, we may sometimes become boulders: being a mother, a father, an elder brother, a friend, a teacher. Occasionally, life gives us the power to influence others, without our being aware of it. Thus, we sway the thoughts of others and, subsequently, their actions.

The title of this essay may have probably suggested that it would be another piece of writing on how to be a good leader or the like, but this essay attempts to make you ponder on the fact of being led. Have you ever mused on the genuineness of your actions? Have you ever considered the fact that your peers may copy your behaviour? People aspire to be like other people and, in doing so, they lose their identity. Identity is what makes us different from others and, consequently, it is immensely valuable. We live in a world in which it is wrong to be unique and it is right to go with the flow and be part of the masses. We ought not to allow our ideals to be corrupted. If there are boulders to be found, those are our own aims and ambitions. At times we follow leaders without knowing we are being manipulated and, at other times, we act as leaders without being aware of our power to exert an influence on our followers. What we fail to see is that we are all potential leaders.